

A Comprehensive Study of Polyswagg's Classification and the Authentic Hip Hop Freestyle Scene in New Zealand

Executive Summary

This report provides a detailed analysis of the distinctions within the global street dance community, specifically addressing the classification of Polyswagg and contrasting it with foundational Hip Hop Street Dance styles. While Polyswagg is an undeniably influential and globally recognized choreographic style, its top-down origin, emphasis on meticulously planned routines, and absence from traditional battle culture fundamentally differentiate it from authentic street dance forms. In stark contrast, New Zealand's authentic Hip Hop freestyle scene emerges as a vibrant, deeply rooted cultural phenomenon. It is characterized by organic community development, a strong emphasis on improvisation, and profound cultural infusion, particularly among Māori and Pacific Islander youth. This scene boasts a rich history, a diverse array of foundational styles including Breaking, Popping, Locking, Krump, Waacking, Vogue, and House Dance, and is supported by a robust ecosystem of dedicated practitioners, pioneering figures, established crews, and community-driven events.

Introduction: Navigating the Nuances of Hip Hop Street Dance in Aotearoa

The landscape of Hip Hop dance is rich and multifaceted, encompassing a spectrum from spontaneous freestyle to highly synchronized choreography. This report aims to clarify the nuanced distinctions within this vibrant community, specifically addressing why Polyswagg, despite the competitive success of The Royal Family, is not categorized as a foundational Hip Hop Street Dance style. Concurrently, it will illuminate the rich and authentic Hip Hop freestyle scene that has organically developed within New Zealand, known as Aotearoa.

Understanding these classifications is not merely an academic exercise; it reflects deeply held cultural values, historical origins, and community practices intrinsic to the global street dance ethos. These distinctions are crucial for appreciating the authenticity, improvisational spirit, and communal development that define foundational street dance forms. The subsequent sections will meticulously define

these characteristics and then apply them to both Polyswagg and the broader New Zealand street dance landscape.

Part 1: Deconstructing Polyswagg – Why It's Not a Foundational Hip Hop Street Dance Style

To comprehend why Polyswagg is not considered a foundational Hip Hop Street Dance style, it is essential to first establish the core characteristics that define authentic street dance forms.

1.1. Core Characteristics of Foundational Freestyle Street Dance Styles

Foundational street dances share intrinsic principles that distinguish them from purely choreographic forms. These principles are deeply embedded in their origins and evolution.

Organic Emergence and Cultural Context: These dance forms typically emerge organically from specific urban communities and social contexts, often serving as a vital form of cultural identity and expression for marginalized groups, or as an "escape from struggle". For instance, Krump provided an escape from gang life, while Waacking and Vogue originated within LGBTQ+ communities seeking safe havens. Their evolution is a "bottom-up" process, shaped by countless individual contributions within shared spaces. This explicit link between foundational street dance and marginalized communities seeking an "escape from struggle" or "safe havens" signifies that these dances are more than just physical movements; they are profound socio-cultural artifacts. They embody resilience, identity, and serve as a non-verbal form of social commentary. This deep cultural root implies that authenticity in street dance is intrinsically tied to its origin and purpose. Any style that borrows aesthetics without embodying this organic, community-driven struggle and expression risks being perceived as superficial or inauthentic by those who live and breathe the culture.

Improvisation and Self-Expression: A fundamental aspect of foundational street dance is spontaneity, where dancers create movements in the moment rather than following predetermined sequences. The core philosophy is "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK," emphasizing genuine, unscripted movement and the development of a "unique style". The maxim "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK" is not merely a stylistic preference but an artistic and ethical imperative within street dance. It demands genuine, in-the-moment

creation and the cultivation of a unique personal voice. This stands in direct opposition to replication or reliance on pre-set routines. This ethos establishes a community value system where originality, spontaneity, and individual contribution are paramount. Deviations from this principle, such as "reusing choreo" or "biting," are often viewed as violations of this core tenet, leading to significant community criticism.

Development in Cyphers and Battle Culture: Foundational styles are developed, tested, and recognized in informal public spaces such as streets, dance parties, block parties, parks, schoolyards, raves, and nightclubs. Cyphers (circles formed by dancers and observers) and battles are crucial environments that foster spontaneous creativity, adaptability, and direct interaction between dancers. Cyphers and battles are described as essential environments for development, testing, and recognition. This indicates that they function not merely as performance spaces but as dynamic, competitive "laboratories" where styles evolve through direct interaction and immediate feedback. The "testing" aspect suggests a form of peer review and validation within the community. Consequently, the notable absence of a style from these spaces means it lacks this organic, community-driven validation and the evolutionary pressure that shapes authentic street dance. It also suggests a lack of adherence to the unwritten "rules" and "governance" of street dance, where peer respect earned through battle prowess and originality is a key measure of credibility.

Codified Vocabulary for Freestyle Application: These styles develop a codified vocabulary of moves (e.g., the 6-step in Breaking, the Jack in House, various pops in Popping). This vocabulary serves as a flexible "blueprint for freestyle dance," allowing for "infinite personal interpretation and creative remixing by individual dancers". The concept of a "codified vocabulary" might initially appear contradictory to "improvisation." However, the description clarifies that it functions as a "blueprint for freestyle," enabling "infinite personal interpretation and creative remixing." This highlights a sophisticated balance: true foundational street dance provides a structured language or set of tools (vocabulary) that empowers individual dancers to express themselves uniquely within that established framework. This contrasts sharply with styles that provide specific movements primarily for replication within a choreographer's singular vision, thereby limiting individual freestyle development.

1.2. Analysis of Polyswagg Against Foundational Criteria

Despite its "undeniable visual impact and widespread recognition," Polyswagg is frequently categorized as a choreographic style rather than a foundational freestyle street dance.

Origins and Evolution: Choreographer-Led vs. Organic Community Development:

Polyswagg is fundamentally a signature style developed and popularized by a single choreographer, Parris Goebel, and her renowned crews, including The Royal Family and ReQuest Dance Crew. Its evolution is described as a "top-down, choreographer-led process," focused on creating polished performances for stage and media, which directly contrasts with the "bottom-up" organic evolution of foundational street dances. This "top-down, choreographer-led process" focused on "polished performances for stage and media" points to a commercial and performance-driven origin. This stands in stark contrast to the organic, community-driven "bottom-up" emergence of foundational styles. This fundamental difference in origin suggests a tension between commercial success and mainstream appeal versus the preservation of cultural authenticity within street dance. Polyswagg's success, while significant, is achieved through a different paradigm that prioritizes spectacle over the raw, improvisational essence of street dance.

Emphasis on Choreography, Not Improvisation: Polyswagg is predominantly showcased through "meticulously planned and highly synchronized group performances" by Goebel's crews. Creative control is consistently attributed to Parris Goebel, with video descriptions explicitly stating "Choreography & Concept by: Parris Goebel". This focus on executing pre-planned routines with precision and synchronization stands in direct contrast to the spontaneous, improvisational nature characteristic of foundational street dance. Online discussions frequently define choreography as "the ability to memorize and execute moves in order as set by the choreographer" and "planning and practicing specific dance moves in a set sequence," while freestyle is "improvising your movements in the moment". The distinction between "meticulously planned" performances and "spontaneous, improvisational" movement highlights that the *mode of practice*—how the dance is created and performed—is a key defining characteristic. Polyswagg's public face is its polished performance, not its improvisational development. For foundational street dance, the practice of improvisation and the development of unique style within a cypher environment are as important, if not more important, than the final polished

performance. Polyswagg's lack of emphasis on this practice, as evidenced by its primary showcase method, reinforces its classification as a choreographic style.

Absence from Cypher and Battle Culture: There is a notable absence of any indication of Polyswagg's active participation or development within freestyle cyphers or battle culture. While these environments are crucial proving grounds for street dance foundations, Polyswagg is typically showcased in polished performance settings, such as the World of Dance Championships or music videos, where the objective is a unified, pre-set display, not spontaneous head-to-head improvisation. The community's criticism of Royal Family dancers "reusing choreo" directly points to a perceived lack of spontaneous improvisation within its public presentations. The explicit statement that cyphers and battles are "crucial proving grounds for street dance foundations" underscores their significance. The "reusing choreo" criticism in these contexts signifies a failure to meet the fundamental expectation of spontaneous originality in a battle setting. For the street dance community, the battle is not just a competition but a cultural ritual that tests a dancer's true mastery of improvisation, adaptability, and originality. Polyswagg's absence or perceived failure in this arena, despite its performance success, is a strong indicator of its non-foundational status in the eyes of the community.

Codification for Replication, Not Freestyle: Although Polyswagg incorporates "distinct and recognizable movements" that serve as trademark motifs, such as the "spine-defying Matrix bullet dodge" or "glitchy, full body twerking," these are presented as elements within a choreographer's specific routines. The emphasis appears to be on replicating Parris Goebel's specific style and choreography, rather than providing a framework for independent freestyle development by a broader community. The distinction between "trademark motifs" within a choreographer's routines and a "blueprint for freestyle dance" is critical. Polyswagg's movements are owned and controlled by the choreographer for replication, whereas foundational styles contribute to a communal, evolving lexicon that empowers individual interpretation. This difference impacts the longevity and organic growth of a style. A style designed primarily for replication, regardless of its popularity, may struggle to foster the independent creative evolution seen in foundational styles, which thrive on individual remixing and personal interpretation.

Cultural Authenticity and "Biting" Concerns: While Polyswagg draws "music inspirations from the DanceHall style," the source material suggests that to be authentically Dancehall, it must come from those "born, living and breathing the culture in Jamaica". Polyswagg's approach appears to be more superficial in this regard, contributing to its choreographic classification. The "freestyle maxim" of "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK" serves as a direct counter to perceived inauthenticity or a lack of genuine, spontaneous expression. There are strong criticisms of The Royal Family for "biting"—copying another dancer's unique round, concept, or signature transition without credit—which is a "serious 'no-no' in street dance culture". Their reliance on "party grooves" in serious street competitions has also been noted as a "lack of real street dance training" and a threat to "global credibility of all NZ dancers". The critiques of "superficial" Dancehall inspiration and "biting" reveal an ethical dimension to street dance. It is not just about the physical movements, but about respect for cultural origins, intellectual property within the community, and the integrity of creative contribution. "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK" extends to cultural honesty. These criticisms highlight a deep concern within the street dance community about the potential for commercial success to dilute or misrepresent authentic cultural forms. The "threat to global credibility of all NZ dancers" suggests that the actions of high-profile groups like The Royal Family can have broader reputational consequences for an entire national scene, underscoring the interconnectedness and shared responsibility within the global community.

1.3. The Royal Family's Success at Hip Hop International (HHI) in Context

The Royal Family has famously dominated the Mega-Crew division at the World Hip Hop Dance Championships (HHI), winning three times consecutively from 2011 to 2013. However, HHI and similar competitions (like World of Dance) often feature meticulously choreographed routines and showcases, rather than purely freestyle battles. There is a notable distinction drawn between success in such crew-based performance competitions, common in HHI, and individual battle prowess in purely freestyle-focused events like Red Bull BC One.

The Royal Family has faced significant criticism, particularly online, for "reusing old choreography" by Parris Goebel, leading to accusations of "running out of ideas" and being labeled "biters". This practice directly contrasts with the expectation of fresh, spontaneous creation highly valued in freestyle street dance, where originality and

individual creative spin are paramount. This perceived lack of originality or a reliance on pre-set material can be viewed negatively within the broader street dance community, impacting the reputation of the entire New Zealand street dance scene globally. The immense mainstream success of The Royal Family at HHI stands in stark contrast to the criticisms they face from the "broader street dance community" regarding "reusing choreo" and "biting." This points to a fundamental difference in what constitutes "success" or "credibility" between mainstream performance circuits and authentic street dance subcultures. Mainstream competitions, while offering exposure and accolades, do not necessarily confer authenticity or respect within the core street dance community if they deviate from foundational principles like improvisation and originality. This creates a tension where commercial success might inadvertently undermine subcultural credibility, potentially affecting the global perception of the entire New Zealand street dance scene.

The following table summarizes the key distinctions discussed:

Characteristic	Foundational Street Dance Styles	Polyswagg
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Origins & Evolution	Organic, "bottom-up" emergence from communities; "escape from struggle"	Signature style, "top-down, choreographer-led process" by Parris Goebel; focused on polished performances for stage/media
Core Emphasis	Spontaneous improvisation, "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK," unique style development	Meticulously planned and highly synchronized group choreography; creative control attributed to choreographer

Development Space	Cyphers and battles in informal public spaces (streets, parties, parks) as "crucial proving grounds"	Polished performance settings (World of Dance, music videos); notable absence from cypher/battle culture
Codification Purpose	Codified vocabulary as a flexible "blueprint for freestyle dance," allowing infinite personal interpretation	Distinct movements as "trademark motifs" within choreographer's routines; emphasis on replication of specific style
Cultural Ethos	Deep cultural identity, genuine expression, originality paramount; "no-no" for "biting"	Perceived "superficial" borrowing of styles (e.g., Dancehall); criticisms of "biting" and "reusing choreo"

Part 2: The Vibrant Landscape of Authentic Hip Hop Freestyle in New Zealand

New Zealand's street dance scene is a vibrant and dynamic cultural phenomenon, deeply rooted in the global Hip Hop culture but uniquely shaped by Aotearoa's spirit and diverse communities. It stands as a testament to cultural adaptation, artistic expression, and robust community building.

2.1. History and Origins

Arrival and Dual Pathway of Adoption: Street dance first arrived in New Zealand in the early 1980s, particularly with breakdancing. This initial wave was facilitated by both American media, including films like *The Warriors*, *Flashdance*, and *Beat Street*, and TV shows such as *That's Incredible*. Crucially, its adoption was also driven by direct kinship connections from American Samoa via Western Samoa. This dual pathway ensured a more organic and deeply embedded cultural adoption within the country. The emphasis on "direct kinship connections from American Samoa via Western Samoa" alongside media influence is critical. This indicates that the cultural transmission was not merely passive consumption but an active, person-to-person

exchange within established community networks. This "dual pathway" explains why street dance became "deeply embedded" in New Zealand, rather than just a fleeting trend. It highlights the power of familial and community ties in fostering authentic cultural adoption and adaptation, providing a strong contrast to the "top-down" commercial dissemination observed with Polyswagg.

Local Adaptation: The "Bop" Phenomenon: A significant local adaptation was the term "bop" (or "bopping"), widely used across New Zealand to collectively refer to b-boying (breaking), popping, and locking, stemming from a Samoan pronunciation of "popping". The unique local term "bop," originating from a Samoan pronunciation, indicates more than just a linguistic quirk. It signifies a process of indigenization and cultural ownership, where the imported art form was adapted and assimilated into local linguistic and cultural frameworks. This adaptation demonstrates the organic integration of street dance into New Zealand's diverse cultural fabric, particularly within Pacific Islander communities, further solidifying its "bottom-up" evolution in the country.

Resonance with Māori and Pacific Islander Youth: Street dance deeply resonated with Māori and Pacific Islander youth, offering a powerful avenue for self-expression, identity formation, and recognition beyond traditional academic or sporting pursuits. This connection was amplified by socio-economic parallels with the experiences of African American and Latino youth in the Bronx, where Hip Hop originated. The explicit mention of "socio-economic parallels" between New Zealand's Māori and Pacific Islander youth and the Bronx's African American and Latino youth reveals a global pattern. Street dance, born from struggle and marginalized communities, naturally finds resonance in other communities facing similar challenges. This shared experience underscores the universal appeal and power of Hip Hop as a vehicle for identity, empowerment, and creative outlet for youth navigating socio-economic adversity. It explains the deep, authentic connection that formed in New Zealand, transcending mere entertainment to become a vital cultural tool.

Profound Cultural Infusion: New Zealand's street dance scene moved beyond mere adoption to profound fusion. Early examples include Joe Moana's breakdance cameos in the Pātea Māori Club's 1984 hit "Poi E," blending Hip Hop with indigenous Māori culture. More contemporary fusions are seen in Krump's similarities to Haka, the "popping puletasi" by Seidah Tuaoui, and John Vaifale's (Happyfeet) integration of

Samoan fa'ataupati and Tongan lakalaka into his Breaking style. This demonstrates how New Zealand breakers innovate by drawing from personal and cultural experiences. The detailed examples of "profound fusion," such as the integration of breakdance into "Poi E," the similarities between Krump and Haka, and the blending of traditional Polynesian dances into Breaking, demonstrate that New Zealand's scene is not simply a replica of global Hip Hop but a unique contributor. Dancers are not just learning moves; they are actively innovating by blending them with their indigenous and cultural heritage. This cultural infusion elevates the New Zealand scene beyond a regional outpost, positioning it as a significant hub of authentic, evolving street dance that enriches the global Hip Hop narrative. It showcases a dynamic cultural exchange where local identity strengthens, rather than dilutes, the art form.

2.2. Key Foundational Styles and Their Evolution in Aotearoa

New Zealand's street dance scene embraces a diverse array of foundational styles, each with its own history and development within the country.

Breaking (B-boying/B-girling): The original dance of Hip Hop, Breaking emerged from the Bronx in the early 1970s, characterized by up-locks, drops, intricate footwork, power moves (like windmills and head spins), and freezes. In New Zealand, Breaking arrived early in the 1980s. Taupuhi Toki (Bboy Papa Smurf) is a veteran of over 20 years who co-founded Instance Movement (ISM) in 1999, winning the first Raw Stylez national event. Common Ground Crew, formed in Christchurch in 2000, became a formidable force, with members like Leerok winning NZ Battle Of The Year in 2004. David McCavitt (Grub-D) and Aron Mahuika (Akorn) from Common Ground also achieved significant international success, representing New Zealand at Red Bull BC One. Key competitions include Raw Stylez, New Zealand Battle Of The Year (BOTY), and Red Bull BC One Asia-South Pacific Qualifiers. Pop, Lock & Break it is a recurring 3v3 battle series featuring Breaking. Organizations and crews supporting Breaking include Instance Movement (ISM), Common Ground Crew, The Projekt Team, and Auckland Breaking Community, which offer classes. En Beat Dance Academy also provides foundational training. The Aotearoa New Zealand Breaking Association is notably involved in Olympic development. The involvement of the "Aotearoa New Zealand Breaking Association" in "Olympic development" signifies a significant trend towards the professionalization and mainstream acceptance of Breaking. While potentially offering new opportunities and resources, this mainstreaming also raises questions

about balancing the authentic, raw spirit of street dance with the demands of competitive sport and institutionalization.

Popping: A funk style born in California in the late 1960s, Popping is defined by rapid muscle contractions, known as "pops" or "hits". It arrived in New Zealand in the early 1980s, initially termed "bopping". K.O.S.-163 (Kosmo Faalogo) introduced popping to Wellington after visiting Los Angeles. Mr. Zee (Zed Nufable), a highly respected figure, specializes in Popping among other styles and began his international journey in 2003. Lawrence Liew is also a passionate dancer and teacher of Popping. River Vili (Mase Boog) is revered as an OG with over 29 years of experience. Ross Smith (Future/Ra Smith) is an OG from Wellington, instrumental in teaching the 2000s generation. Popping was featured in early events like Bop Olympics (1984) and the televised Shazam Bop Competition (1985). More recently, it is seen in the Pop What You Got series and Funk in da House. The Auckland Popping Community (APC), rebranded to Auckland Popping Club in 2023, is a central hub for jams and events. Boogiehood Connection is an established New Zealand Funkstyles crew.

Locking: A fun and funky style from Los Angeles, originating in the late 1960s, Locking combines fast movements with freezing in improvisational positions. It arrived in New Zealand in the early 1980s as part of the broader "bop culture". Key OGs include Locking Lizah and Vaugh Aiono (Cool Vee), both from Boogie Hood Connection. Kat Walker (Katto Lock) is a legendary figure who emphasizes spontaneity and nurtures new dancers. Mele Taeiloa (Marshmele) is a preeminent figure and Head of Learning Area for Dance at Manurewa High School. John Bernardo (JB) is a respected locker and teacher, and Joshua Mitikulena (Kokonut/Koko Lock) is known for his "Locktång Style". Locking is featured in the Pop, Lock & Break it series, and dedicated "Lock It In" Locking Events are organized by LH Combine. Organizations and crews include NZ Lockers/NZ Campbellockers, dedicated to preserving the original Campbellocking style, Boogie Hood Connection (BHC), Kinetic Studio, and En Beat Dance Academy. The fact that Mele Taeiloa holds the position of "Head of Learning Area for Dance at Manurewa High School" and that "NZ Lockers/NZ Campbellockers are dedicated to preserving the original Campbellocking style" indicates a dual strategy for cultural transmission: formal education and dedicated preservation efforts. This suggests a mature scene that actively works to ensure the longevity and authentic transmission of its styles, not just through informal cyphers but also through institutionalized learning and specialized preservation groups.

Krump: Krump emerged from South Central Los Angeles in the early 2000s as a free, expressive, exaggerated, highly energetic, and upright non-violent outlet for emotional release. The acronym K.R.U.M.P. stands for "Kingdom Radically Uplifted Mighty Praise," reflecting its faith-based undertones. In New Zealand, Krump gained popularity around 2005 through screenings of the *Rize* documentary, DVDs, and social media. A high percentage of early practitioners were of Polynesian heritage. Ken Vaega (Lightsaber/Jr Street Beast) is the first New Zealander to win the Krump World Championships in 2018. Joash Fahitua hosted the first Krump competition in New Zealand. Byrin Mita (XIII/Kidd Konkrete) is a top Krumper and founder of XIII WRLD, and Israel Adesanya (Black Majik) was a prominent early Krumper. Competitions include NZ Krump Nationals (KN) and The Beatdown events. Early events include the Krump VS B-Boyz Battle (2006). Projekt Feel Good is an annual event that includes Krump. Supporting organizations and "Fams" include EXCBS Krump Fam, Lighthouse Fam (later LH Combine), XIII WRLD collective/XIII Fam, and Krump Aotearoa, which serves as a central support network. Krump Klub NZ provides safe spaces, and Silo Sessions are new dedicated spaces in Auckland. Ken Vaega's achievement of winning the "Krump World Championships (2018)" demonstrates New Zealand's global impact in this style. The high percentage of practitioners of "Polynesian heritage" and Byrin Mita's observation of "similarities between Krump and Haka" indicate a deep cultural resonance and adaptation. Krump's emphasis on emotional release and its faith-based undertones, combined with its strong resonance with Polynesian cultural forms like Haka, suggests a powerful cross-cultural connection. New Zealand dancers are not merely adopting Krump but are infusing it with their own cultural forms of expression and emotional release, making it uniquely Aotearoa.

Waacking: Waacking is a dynamic, expressive style from the 1970s Los Angeles LGBTQ+ club scene, characterized by fluid, rotational arm movements, intricate posing, and theatricality, typically performed to disco funk. It is rooted in cultural reclamation, evolving from "punking". Waacking has a relatively recent narrative in New Zealand, driven by individuals who trained overseas. Jaydess Nand is a pivotal figure, having trained with OG Tyrone 'The Bone' Proctor, and is a co-leader of The Jaackers and founder of New Zealand battles like 'Waack It Out' and 'Whats Yo Style'. Rina Chae is the Mother of Imperial House of Waacking (New Zealand chapter). Hayley Walters-Tekahika founded Prowl Productions, New Zealand's premiere Waacking and street dance company. Competitions include 'Waack It Out', the first to formalize

Waacking competition in New Zealand, the Ladies of Hip Hop New Zealand Festival, which explicitly includes Waacking battles and workshops, and World of Waacking Battles, which encourage ethnic cultural representation. Imperial House of Waacking NZ (IHOW NZ) won World of Dance NZ qualifiers. Organizations and crews include Candee Waackers (a subunit of Candee Collective), The Jaackers, IHOW NZ, Waackalicious, and Prowl Productions. The narrative highlights that New Zealand Waacking was "driven by individuals who trained overseas," specifically Jaydess Nand training with "OG Tyrone 'The Bone' Proctor." This direct lineage from foundational figures, combined with the local formalization of battles like 'Waack It Out,' represents a successful model for importing and establishing a foundational style: direct transmission from OGs ensures authenticity, while local pioneers then formalize and build community infrastructure (battles, houses) to foster its growth and adaptation within the local context.

Vogue (Ballroom): Vogue is a highly stylized modern house dance from the Harlem ballroom scene of the 1960s–1980s, inspired by fashion magazine poses, featuring angular, linear, and rigid movements. It gained mainstream exposure with Madonna's "Vogue" and the *Paris Is Burning* documentary in 1990. In New Zealand, Vogue is a relatively young but flourishing subculture, primarily within LGBTQI+ Pacific Islander communities. FAFSWAG Arts Collective, comprising Pati Solomona Tyrell and Tanu Gago, held New Zealand's first vogue balls in Ōtara, South Auckland, in 2013. Jaycee Tanuvasa is a pioneer and founding Mother to the international House of Iman, creating events specifically for "queer brown people". Mother Mistress Coven–Carangi facilitated early balls, and Peggy Yao and Earl De Castro are also notable dancers. New Zealand hosts various Vogue balls, such as the Pride Wairau Vogue Leather and Lace Ball. Vogue is also showcased at Ladies of Hip Hop Aotearoa, and Projekt Feel Good incorporates vogue movements. Key organizations, crews, and "Houses" include House of Coven (the first official house, established in 2015), House of Iman, and Wellington Ballroom. Prowl Productions also offers Vogue workshops. Vogue's strong connection to "LGBTQI+ Pacific Islander communities" and the FAFSWAG Arts Collective's commitment to "social change through arts and innovation," along with Jaycee Tanuvasa creating events for "queer brown people," highlights that this dance form transcends mere entertainment. It serves as a powerful tool for social justice, identity affirmation, and creating safe spaces for marginalized groups. The flourishing of Vogue in New Zealand underscores the continued role of street dance as a vehicle for

community building and empowerment, particularly for those at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. It demonstrates how art can directly address social needs and foster inclusivity.

House Dance: House Dance originated in the underground club scenes of Chicago and New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is characterized by freedom, improvisation, a deep connection to music (especially bass), intricate footwork, and distinct body isolations, embodying the ethos of "check your ego at the door". In New Zealand, Lawrence Liew created the "Auckland House dance Community (AHC)" Facebook group in 2014. Sheldon Rua founded FALEHEDDZ in 2023, a prominent House Dance and Culture movement in the South Pacific, known for hosting free weekly House Jams. Mr. Zee leads the HipHop & House Dance Headz / HipHop Househeads Aotearoa community. John Vaifale (Happyfeet) is a versatile Hip Hop Freestyler who blends House and is a prominent DJ for battles and jams. John Bernardo (JB) previously taught regular House dance classes. New Zealand hosts weekly House dance classes and jams (AHC, FALEHEDDZ). Britomart Backyard Battles include House, and the "Only. House: The House Dance Cypher" event has been held. Ladies Of Hip Hop Aotearoa 2025 featured exhibition battles and workshops with international House icon Toyin Sogunro. Funk in da House is an energetic 1v1 battle. Key organizations and crews include FALEHEDDZ, Auckland House dance Community (AHC), and HipHop & House Dance Headz / HipHop Househeads Aotearoa. En Beat Dance Academy also offers House classes. The mention of "free weekly House Jams" hosted by FALEHEDDZ and the "Auckland House dance Community (AHC) Facebook group" as a central hub highlights the critical role of accessible, informal spaces and digital platforms in fostering a dance community. These open, low-barrier environments are crucial for nurturing new talent, allowing dancers to practice improvisation, and strengthening community bonds, effectively replicating the original "cypher" environment in a contemporary context.

The following table provides a concise overview of these foundational styles in New Zealand:

Style	Origins (Brief)	Key NZ Pioneers/OGs	Major NZ Events/Competitions	Key NZ Organizations/Crews
Breaking	Bronx, early 1970s	Taupuhi Toki (Bboy Papa Smurf), Leerok, David McCavitt (Grub-D), Aron Mahuika (Akorn)	Raw Stylez, NZ Battle Of The Year (BOTY), Red Bull BC One Asia-South Pacific Qualifiers, Pop, Lock & Break it	Instance Movement (ISM), Common Ground Crew, The Projekt Team, Auckland Breaking Community, Aotearoa NZ Breaking Association
Popping	California, late 1960s	K.O.S.-163 (Kosmo Faalogo), Mr. Zee (Zed Nufable), Lawrence Liew, River Vili (Mase Boog), Ross Smith (Future/Ra Smith)	Bop Olympics (1984), Shazam Bop Competition (1985), Pop What You Got, Funk in da House	Auckland Popping Community (APC)/Club, Boogiehood Connection
Locking	Los Angeles, late 1960s	Locking Lizah, Vaugh Aiono (Cool Vee), Kat Walker (Katto Lock), Mele Taeiloa (Marshmele), John Bernardo (JB), Joshua	Pop, Lock & Break it, Lock It In	NZ Lockers/NZ Campbellockers, Boogie Hood Connection (BHC), Kinetic Studio, En Beat Dance Academy

		Mitikulena (Kokonut/Kok o Lock)		
Krump	South Central LA, early 2000s	Ken Vaega (Lightsaber/Jr Street Beast), Joash Fahitua, Byrin Mita (XIII/Kidd Konkrete), Israel Adesanya (Black Majik)	NZ Krump Nationals (KN), The Beatdown, Krump VS B-Boyz Battle (2006), Projekt Feel Good	EXCBS Krump Fam, Lighthouse Fam (LH Combine), XIII WRLD collective/XIII Fam, Krump Aotearoa, Krump Klub NZ
Waacking	LA LGBTQ+ club scene, 1970s	Jaydess Nand, Rina Chae, Hayley Walters-Tekah ika	Waack It Out, Ladies of Hip Hop NZ Festival, World of Waacking Battles	Candee Waackers, The Jaackers, Imperial House of Waacking NZ (IHOW NZ), Waackalicious, Prowl Productions
Vogue	Harlem ballroom scene, 1960s-1980s	Jaycee Tanuvasa, Mother Mistress Coven-Carang i, Peggy Yao, Earl De Castro	Vogue balls, Pride Wairau Vogue Leather and Lace Ball, Ladies of Hip Hop Aotearoa, Projekt Feel Good	FAFSWAG Arts Collective, House of Coven, House of Iman, Wellington Ballroom, Prowl Productions

House Dance	Chicago/NY club scene, late 1970s-early 1980s	Lawrence Liew, Sheldon Rua, Mr. Zee, John Vaifale (Happyfeet), John Bernardo (JB)	Weekly House Jams, Britomart Backyard Battles, Only. House: The House Dance Cypher, Funk in da House	FALEHEDDZ, Auckland House dance Community (AHC), HipHop & House Dance Headz / HipHop Househeads Aotearoa, En Beat Dance Academy
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2.3. Prominent Practitioners, Pioneers, OGs, Leaders, & Outstanding Dancers

The New Zealand street dance scene is rich with influential individuals who have shaped and continue to drive its evolution, demonstrating multi-faceted contributions.

Mr. Zee (Zed Nufable/BoogiebotZee): A highly respected figure across New Zealand and Australian street dance, specializing in Hip Hop Freestyle, House, and Popping. He began his journey in the Philippines in the 1980s, competing and judging internationally since 2003. Mr. Zee is also a co-owner and director of En Beat Dance Academy and a leader of HipHop Househeadz Aotearoa and 603 Boogie Squad.

John Vaifale "Happyfeet": A versatile Hip Hop Freestyler, recognized as the Red Bull Dance Your Style NZ National Champion in 2023 and Faleheddz Vol. 1 Champion. He is also a prominent DJ for battles and jams, known for blending styles including House, Locking, Popping, and Krump, and notably integrating Polynesian culture into his dance.

Taupuhi Toki (Bboy Papa Smurf): An influential MC and B-boy with over 20 years of experience. He co-founded Instance Movement (ISM) breaking crew and is a co-director of NZ Street Talk. Taupuhi Toki frequently judges major events and teaches breaking across the country.

Ken Vaega (Lightsaber/Jr Street Beast): The first New Zealander to win the Krump World Championships in 2018. He is the founder of Lighthouse Fam, co-founder of LH Combine, and runs the Krump Club of Ōtara, actively supporting youth development. Ken Vaega teaches street dance internationally and is a respected MC for battles.

Rina Chae: Known as New Zealand's Queen of K-Pop, Rina Chae is a leading choreographer, judge, and educator. She is a co-owner and director of En Beat Dance Academy, the Mother of Imperial House of Waacking (NZ chapter), and a driving force behind the "Ladies of Hip Hop Aotearoa" festival.

Byrin Mita (XIII/Kidd Konkrete/former Jr Mutiny): The founder of XIII WRDL collective and XIII Fam, Byrin Mita is dedicated to nurturing young talent in Krump, Hip Hop, Popping, and Locking. He frequently notes the similarities and connections between Krump and Haka.

Stacy Meng (Baby XIII/8face): A versatile young prodigy who excels in Waacking, Popping, Locking, and Krump. Her talent was recognized internationally when she won the Youth Division - All Styles at Step Ya Game Up 2023 in New York City.

Jaydess Nand: A pivotal figure in establishing and leading the Waacking community in New Zealand. She is a co-leader of The Jaackers and the founder of New Zealand's first formalized Waacking battles, 'Waack It Out'. Jaydess Nand has also developed her unique "Desi Waack" style.

Kat Walker (Katto Lock): Considered a "legendary" figure in New Zealand street dance, Kat Walker is active in Locking, Breaking, and All-Styles. She frequently judges major battles and is passionately committed to nurturing new dancers in the scene.

Mele Taeiloa (Marshmele): A preeminent figure in New Zealand's Locking community and the Head of Learning Area for Dance at Manurewa High School. She is associated with Projekt Team and NZ Lockers, and actively performs and competes internationally.

John Bernardo (JB/Prevail): A respected figure in both the Locking and House communities. He is a member of 603 Boogie Squad and NZ Campbelllocking, and consistently emphasizes the importance of foundations and cultural acknowledgment in dance.

Josh Mitikulena (Kokonut): The founder of Hopskotch Dance Crew (2008) and The Projekt Team (2014). His aim is to create open, accessible environments for dancers, and he frequently integrates street dance with New Zealand cultural themes.

Sheldon Rua: The founder of FALEHEDDZ, a prominent House Dance movement, and a member of Projekt Team. Sheldon Rua uniquely combines street dance with spoken word poetry in his artistic expression.

The descriptions of these individuals reveal a rich tapestry of leadership within the New Zealand street dance scene. This includes OGs with decades of experience, international champions, educators integrating dance into formal schooling, community builders creating safe spaces and events, and those emphasizing cultural fusion. This diverse and multi-generational leadership structure indicates a highly resilient and sustainable street dance ecosystem in New Zealand. It is not reliant on a single figure but on a network of dedicated individuals who are not only skilled practitioners but also deeply committed to teaching, organizing, preserving, and innovating, thereby ensuring the scene's continued vitality and authentic growth.

2.4. The Ecosystem of Crews & Organisations

The New Zealand street dance scene is supported by a robust and interconnected ecosystem of crews and organizations that provide infrastructure and foster its development.

Projekt Team: New Zealand's largest All Style Street Dance collective, founded by Josh Mitikulena in 2014. This organization plays a crucial role in the scene, organizing major events such as Britomart Backyard Battles, the Fusion Concept NZ Qualifier, and Projekt Feel Good, all aimed at fostering an "open and accessible environment" for dancers.

En Beat Dance Academy: Co-founded by Rina Chae and Mr. Zee (Zed Nufable) in 2020, this academy offers foundational classes in a wide range of street dance styles, including Hip Hop, Breaking, Popping, House, Locking, and Waacking. Its mission is to create clear "pathways for younger dancers" to engage with and progress in these art forms.

Auckland Popping Community (APC) / Auckland Popping Club (APC): This vital public Facebook group and Instagram platform serves as a "central nexus for popping dancers to connect, share information, and host free jam sessions," playing a crucial role in community building and informal learning.

NZ Lockers / NZ Campbellockers: These dedicated collectives focus on "preserving and promoting the original Campbellocking style," which is crucial for ensuring the authentic transmission of this foundational dance form across generations.

Krump Aotearoa: Established in 2012, Krump Aotearoa functions as a "central support network" for the New Zealand Krump community, organizing significant events and fostering the growth of the style.

Lighthouse Fam (later LH Combine): This South Auckland collective, established by Ken Vaega, is instrumental in organizing events such as "Beatdown" and running the Krump Club of Ōtara, actively supporting youth development within the Krump community.

Imperial House of Waacking NZ (IHOW NZ): As the New Zealand chapter of the global Imperial House of Waacking, led by Rina Chae, this organization has achieved competitive success and has been instrumental in the resurgence and formalization of Waacking in the country.

XIII WRDL Collective: Founded by Byrin Mita, this collective operates as a high-performance street dance team and developmental program, focusing on fostering young talent across various street styles, including Krump, Hip Hop, Popping, and Locking.

Common Ground Crew: A Christchurch-based breaking crew formed in 2000, known for consistently producing top-quality breakers and achieving significant international success in the Breaking scene.

Instance Movement (ISM): A breaking crew co-founded by Taupuhi Toki in 1999, its establishment signaled a "second wave" of breaking resurgence in New Zealand, further solidifying the style's presence.

Street Talk: An organization co-founded by Taupuhi Toki and Dianamite, Street Talk focuses on Christian Hip Hop events, workshops, and battles, actively promoting community building through shared values.

Prowl Productions: New Zealand's premiere Waacking and street dance company, founded by Hayley Walters-Tekahika, dedicated to creating spaces for femme and street dance styles and offering free workshops to the community.

FAFSWAG Arts Collective: A pioneering collective for the vogue/ballroom scene, FAFSWAG is committed to social change through arts and innovation, primarily serving LGBTQI+ Pacific Islander communities and fostering inclusive spaces.

Ladies of Hip Hop Aotearoa (LOHH NZ): A significant annual festival that celebrates and uplifts women and girls in Hip Hop and street dance culture, featuring battles and workshops across various styles, promoting female empowerment within the scene.

FALEHEDDZ: A prominent House Dance and Culture movement in the South Pacific, actively contributing to the growth and visibility of House Dance in the region.

The sheer number and diversity of organizations listed, including collectives, academies, community groups, "fams," and "houses," reveal a highly interconnected ecosystem. These entities cover the full spectrum of street dance activities, from foundational training through academies, to community jams, to competitive events, to cultural preservation efforts, and youth development programs. This robust and multi-layered organizational structure is crucial for the long-term health and growth of the New Zealand street dance scene. It ensures that talent is nurtured from the grassroots, foundational knowledge is preserved, opportunities for expression and competition are abundant, and the cultural relevance of the dance forms is maintained across generations and diverse communities. This contrasts sharply with a model dominated by a single choreographer or commercial entity, highlighting the strength of a distributed, community-led approach.

Conclusion: The Distinctive Paths and Enduring Spirit of NZ Street Dance

In conclusion, while Polyswagg is a highly influential and celebrated choreographic style born in New Zealand, it fundamentally differs from foundational Hip Hop Street Dance styles in its origin, creative process, and community engagement. Its "top-down, choreographer-led process," emphasis on "meticulously planned performances," and notable absence from traditional "cypher and battle culture" are key distinguishing factors. Furthermore, its focus on replication rather than improvisation, coupled with concerns about cultural authenticity and "biting," further solidify its classification as a choreographic performance style rather than an authentic freestyle foundation.

Conversely, New Zealand's true Hip Hop freestyle scene is a deeply rooted, community-driven, and culturally integrated landscape. Its history reveals an organic emergence, profoundly shaped by "direct kinship connections" and "socio-economic parallels" that fostered a deep resonance with Māori and Pacific Islander youth. This scene is defined by a "profound cultural infusion," where indigenous and Polynesian heritage is not merely adopted but actively integrated into various authentic styles, creating a unique contribution to the global Hip Hop narrative. The vibrancy of this scene is sustained by a dedicated network of pioneers, OGs, leaders, crews, and events that continue to foster improvisation, self-expression, and cultural pride. This collective effort ensures the enduring authenticity and vitality of Hip Hop street dance in Aotearoa, standing as a powerful testament to its organic evolution and community strength.